3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
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565 social ladder, while others are ex-peasants on the way up. Acceptance
569 by the élite entails requirements severe enough to discourage many
aspirants; at the same time, the heavens can be stormed by those
[55] willing to endure the heat and strain of battle. Lacking descent from
former affranchis, the only means by which the ambitious may
achieve entrance into the élite caste is by money, education, sustained
social show and leisure, "proper" marriage, and separation from
lower caste friends; and one generation rarely suffices to win ac-
ceptance by the élite.

565 The townspeople rarely attempt to break down the caste barrier.
Servants, day laborers, delivery clerks, menials in general, they con-
sider themselves one step removed from the peasants, and they know
their place in the social hierarchy. By the scrupulous observances of
the élite, by the casual acceptance of their status by the peasants, even
by the very effort of the ambitious to improve their lot, the caste
system is constantly reaffirmed and fulfilled.

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565 829 ill-mannered vulgarity, their superficiality of mind, their poor taste. He knows well enough that it is not fair to judge a whole nation by a few representatives, yet it is clear to him that these raucous whites regard themselves, and are by others regarded, as lords of creation who need never worry about social acceptance. The Haitian knows himself the superior of most of these white people, whether the test be intellectual or on the basis of gentility. Nevertheless, the white inferior is preferred by all the world to his Haitian superior. The white American can go anywhere and, with his carefree self-assurance, see all doors open to him; the cultured Haitian can go few places away from home, and in even those few many doors are yet closed in his face.

Whether the result of his reflections, which must be provoked anew each time the tourist invasion begins, leads him to bitterness or to cynical acceptance depends upon his temperament. It would be almost impossible not to envy the assurance of the white man. And what must life be like when the thought of one's birth, over which one had no control, forever rises as a spectre to haunt one's daily awareness?

Distress of mind may lead the élite in public to impassioned defense of Haitian achievement, but in private he will be all the while imitating the white man and accepting his judgments. The word "ambivalence" is descriptive of his attitude: he wishes to go both ways, to justify Haiti, yet to be regarded as white. Haitian tradition pulls him in one direction, white superiorities the other. There is probably not a single member of the élite who does not feel as if half life's burdens would disappear if only one were white. The darker complexion is one of those hard facts which simply cannot be got around. But one's children can be lighter, and one's grandchildren lighter still, if one marries wisely.

565 55 This is a hope of the future. Meantime there is a pattern of behavior for the present. What has made the white man master of the Western World seems to have been a combination of money, political power, intellectual attainment, and social domination of inferiors. After these, therefore, the proper youth must strive indefatigably. Since these aims are common to the élite they are hardly mentioned; indeed, one wonders sometimes whether even the people themselves are aware of the foundations of their ambition.

No élite man in Haiti ever made money by working with his

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hands. In colonial times farmers came to plantation owners, and since then have come only to political officeholders. With money one can go to France where he will be accepted as a human being, not turned aside as a Negro; with money one can get an education, live a life of leisure, acquire luxuries. Hence the popularity of law as a profession, for it is the career by which one enters politics. That a president should begin life as an impecunious barrister and end it as a well-to-do landlord, the owner of several villas and motorcars, seems praiseworthy, natural, logical. The American success story is "from log cabin to White House," but with no implication of monetary gain from such progress; the Haitian success story is rather "from penury to plutocracy."

It is not enough, however, to aim high in the material sphere. In proportion to their numbers the élite are extraordinarily ambitious for intellectual achievement. A distinction is sometimes made between the social élite and the intellectual élite, the former being decidedly more numerous.[1] Conversation in a Haitian drawing room is likely to be on about the same intellectual plane as in America except in specifically literary and artistic circles. Poetry, philosophy, literary trends, historical speculation are staples of discussion in more than a few homes. A recent president wrote many metaphysical poems. An American author, attending a social function consisting chiefly of secretaries of state, was amazed to find the group absorbed in a dispute about poetry.[2]

Aristocrats have always kept the lower orders at a distance socially. In Haiti this rule is observed with rigor. To suggest that a possible reason for such harshness of attitude and behavior toward servants and working people might be fear lest white visitors should class all persons of color together would be unkind, though not unsound. In general, there is a deep conviction that the masses are stupid. Although persons of culture exist who are generally solicitous for the betterment of their life, there is really no comparison which will make clear to the white reader the ordinary attitude of mind of

1. This distinction is clearly made in John Leiby, "Caste and Class in Haiti," *American Journal of Sociology*, XLVI, No. 1 (July, 1940), p. 30 ff.

2. W. B. Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, p. 161. "On my way home from the palace," concludes the author, "I reflected how queer it would seem for a group of cabinet ministers and Treasury officials at the White House to be earnestly discussing the poetry of an American anthology which included metaphysical love-lyrics by Calvin Coolidge."